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'Nurses can confirm death' – Doctor's note on woman, 84

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An elderly woman, described as 'well and comfortable' the day before she was sent to a Gosport hospital, had a note written on her records on arrival saying a doctor was happy for nurses to confirm her death.

Ruby Lake was 84 when she was transferred to Gosport War Memorial Hospital in August 1998. She died there three days later.

She had suffered a broken hip in a fall at home in Alverstoke, Gosport, and was given an emergency hip replacement at the Royal Hospital Haslar.

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But after a three-week stay at that hospital she was moved to Gosport War Memorial for rehabilitation.

The day she arrived Gosport GP Dr Jane Barton immediately wrote on her notes that she was happy for nurses to confirm her death.

At a London hearing at the General Medical Council examining Dr Barton's fitness to practise, a Royal Navy surgeon said he was 'surprised' to see that written on Mrs Lake's notes.

Surgeon Commander Timothy Coltman, who was a senior house officer at Haslar in 1998, said that from Mrs Lake's Haslar notes he could see that before her transfer she had been making reasonable progress for a woman of her age.

He said: 'At 9am on the day she was transferred to the War Memorial her notes say that she was 'well, comfortable and happy'.

GMC panel member Dr Roger Smith said to Sgn-Cdr Coltman: 'You saw her on the day of her transfer. You said she was bright and alert.

'The nursing staff said she was mobilising with a Zimmer frame. Do you find it surprising that when she arrived at the War Memorial hospital she had 'happy for nursing staff to confirm death' written on her notes?'

Sgn-Cdr Coltman said: 'Yes, it is surprising that she could have deteriorated so quickly.'

(proceeding)